



# Change for the Better

## A Six-Decade Teaching Veteran Learns He Has a Few More Tricks Up His Sleeve

David Gural, math teacher at Eagle High School in the Meridian school district, has taught for 41 years. He's stood at the helm of a classroom in six different decades. In the first, in 1969, he was required to wear a white shirt, tie and sports coat every day. He retired from teaching in Washington State and started a second career teaching in Idaho.

But Gural is far from "old school." Quite to the contrary, he's very "new school." Every other day he steps in front of a camera and broadcasts dual-credit Calculus II out over video conferencing equipment and IEN. Gural is proof positive that, indeed, you can teach a seasoned dog new tricks. Especially one that's kept his sense of humor and hasn't grown rigid and intractable.

Of his teaching longevity, he laughs, "It's not easy, but I'm getting better at it every year. I think I'm finally getting the knack." When he sees a teacher getting a little too self-assured at six, seven, eight years, Gural

can't help but smile. "They think they've got it all figured out. Not so."

### Change is the only constant

Count on it, says Gural: something unfamiliar always lies in store. The odd, the unrecognizable, the alien ever lies in store. Change inevitably will come rolling around the bend.

It came to him in the form of video teleconferencing (VTC). When you're a star, it seems, cameras will follow.

With a master's in mathematics and decades of experience teaching every K-12 math subject, Boise State University approved Gural four years ago for concurrent credit in Calculus I and II, meaning that his students get both high school and college credit for both those courses. In fact, Boise State recognizes him as an adjunct professor. Understandably, students at another

Joint School District No. 2 high school, Rocky Mountain, voiced an interest in taking Gural's course. Rocky Mountain High's principal agreed to bus the students to Eagle. Gural suggested to his principal that they look into a desktop VTC solution such as Skype. The principal one-upped him. The district had just been added to the IEN implementation schedule. The network and the video teleconferencing equipment would be ready in time for intra-district distance learning to begin in August 2009.

### A veteran teacher learns some new tricks

Gural was game. He received two days of training with Dr. Lance Ford, a multimedia specialist who works with teachers across the nation on implementing VTC into their curricula. The day before school started,



← Eagle High School math teacher David Gural works a formula under the document camera so that his traditional class and the one miles away watching via video teleconferencing can see it.

Gural saw his school's new equipment. It was nothing like what he had trained on. Suddenly, he was afflicted with self-doubt. He went to the principal and told him, "I'm not sure I can do this. You're trying to teach an old dog new tricks." The principal convinced him to give it a try.

## As IEN Adoption Grows, So Does Advocacy

Less than a year into implementation, I'm thrilled to see that the ranks of ardent IEN proponents are growing. Civic and business leaders are experiencing its value, legislators are becoming believers (many are even using it themselves to dialogue with their constituents), but most importantly it's the IEN's primary users—teachers and students—that are more and more convinced of its awesome instructional power and are spreading the

news. You've read the success stories—about the IEN's potential for cutting costs, closing achievement gaps and connecting to educational opportunities far beyond the classroom walls—here in this newsletter. Perhaps you've heard them through the grapevine. Maybe you've experienced it yourself. Then you know

Continued on page 2

Continued on page 3





Continued from cover

## IEN Advocates Are Piling Up

firsthand: too use the IEN is to love the IEN.

I'd like to share quickly some of the stories that I've heard from districts that are connected to the IEN, utilizing it and/or familiar with it and proclaiming its praises:

- **Homedale School District, Technology Director David Homes**

Because of the IEN, Holmes says, "Now we have high-speed dedicated fiber. Now that this is built in our district, we have the ability to scale our broadband connection for many years without expensive build-outs." There has been an enormous amount of coordination among the school districts and the IEN. Putting the brakes on now would all but kill the project. I would like to remind you of the purpose of the project. It is to level the technological gap between the urban and rural school districts in Idaho."

- **Idaho School Boards Association, Executive Director Karen Echeverria**

"Idaho schools need the opportunities that the bandwidth infrastructure created by the IEN provides ... Rural schools especially benefit from the opportunities provided through the IEN's network, which they would not have access

*"This [virtual field trip] experience will forever change and impact my life ... [and has] given me a different perspective on life."*

*—Sugar-Salem High School Student*

to otherwise. The IEN is a crucial component in providing Idaho youth with the best educational opportunities possible regardless of district size, location or resources. Idaho students deserve to have

their schools brought into the 21st century and IEN is vital to making this happen."

- **Weiser High School, Principal David Davies**

Not only the high school, but the entire Weiser community has taken advantage of the IEN and its video teleconferencing capabilities. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Students are taking college-level coursework from the College of Southern Idaho
- Staff are taking graduate-level coursework from Northwest Nazarene University
- Students are taking dual-credit Psychology from Emmett High School; in return, Emmett students taking Holocaust Literature from Weiser
- Local citizens are taking workforce training classes from Idaho State University

- Weiser police officers are taking POST training originating at the College of Western Idaho

- Local medical professionals are participating in the Community Healthcare Forum hosted by St. Luke's hospital in Boise

- Elementary students are taking virtual field trips to NASA, Canada's Royal Botanical Gardens and Alaska's Sea Life Center

- Administrators and students have met with Idaho's House and Senate Education Committees over video teleconferencing (VTC)

Thanks to the IEN, says Principal Davies, "Living in a rural community no longer puts students at an educational disadvantage ... I know that these are difficult economic times for everyone in Idaho. The educational opportunities and trainings now available over the IEN will save the students of Weiser High School and the members of the Weiser community thousands of dollars in tuition and travel costs."

- **Salmon School District, Technology Coordinator Joe Steele**

Prior the IEN deployment in Salmon, says Steele, his district "was abandoned by a previous Internet service provider" and was left without service. "Now that we have the IEN, we not only have access to high-quality broadband, we also have the tools to allow our students and our community to see the world."

- **Joint School District No. 365 (Bruneau, Grand View and Oreana), District Technology Coordinator and Athletic Director William Goodman**

Since Joint School district No. 365 just connected to the network two different sheriff departments have been training three times a week over VTC and the local volunteer EMTs are also using it. Goodman looks forward to being "able to offer out students courses they would never have been able to take in our small district. We

Continued from cover

## VTC Has Improved His Teaching

"I struggled with it for a month," says Gural. "I pushed the wrong buttons. I was outside the camera's view. The camera angle was all wrong. In my lessons I was making uncharacteristic mistakes because I was concentrating on the equipment. I'm a real active teacher. I use a 12-foot wide whiteboard and run PowerPoint presentations on a 43-inch flat-screen television above that. I'm all over the place. It wasn't natural for me being locked in a corner. It crimped my style."

Predictably, he got the knack of it.

Today, he's juggling technologies like a pro as he stands and delivers to more than 40 students with the help of VTC: drawing on the screen of his computer, displaying his examples on his interactive whiteboard with a document camera, using his Texas Instruments Presenter to display his graphing calculator's images in three dimensions on the large-screen television, controlling the camera and other equipment with agility and aplomb. Since hearing about the success and the dual-credit nature of the distance-learning calculus class, about 20 more students at Rocky Mountain have decided to enroll next year.

### VTC isn't a replacement, but an enhancer and an empowerer

"Change is a good thing," he concludes. "I think teaching and learning over video teleconferencing is a really good thing. But change can be hard to accept. There are some teachers that are afraid that this kind of technology will replace teachers. I tell them that they're missing the point. No school or district is going to cut a teacher just to beam me in. This is not a replacement, it's an opportunity to add instruction that you just can't offer."

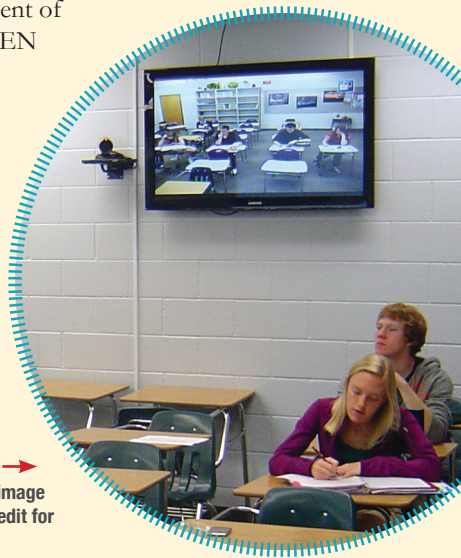
Says Gural: "Coming to Idaho from Washington was a huge change for me and my wife," who is also a teacher. "We didn't know a single person in this entire state. We were retired and starting over in a new system, so we had no seniority. We didn't know the ropes. We were given new classes to teach. And you know what? It made us better teachers. We had to rethink how we taught, all of our assumptions. It was a great thing for us."

### Putting on a show

Recently, he did a demonstration of teaching over VTC at Rocky Mountain High. To his surprise, Idaho State Department of Education Superintendent Tom Luna and IEN Communications Director Garry Lough showed up. Afterward, Lough walked up to him, congratulated him on his masterful performance and told him, "I need to take you on the road with me. That was an amazing show."

In his sixth decade of teaching, the poster child of one of education's hottest technologies isn't resting on his laurels. "I've taught a long time," says Gural, "but there's always something new to learn."

Students of both Eagle High School, in the foreground, → and Rocky Mountain High School, seen in the television image on the back wall, will receive high school and college credit for passing David Gural's Calculus II class.



## One District Saves Nearly \$50K

will also be able to offer them live college courses for the first time ever.” Furthermore, the district’s previous Internet service provider—the area’s only option—charged \$1,200 per month for subpar speeds. Since the local provider also required a three-year contract, Goodman calculates that his IEN connectivity alone represents an immediate \$43,200 savings over three years.

- **Sugar-Salem High School, English Teacher Jim Winn and Principal Jared Jinks**

Winn teaches a course on the Holocaust and has recently added a new dimension to his course: a “close encounter” as he calls it with an actual Holocaust survivor via VTC on the IEN. He says that “providing education as we have in the past will give us the same results.” He hails the advent of “a new, entrepreneurial spirit to education using distance technologies” and cites the responses of students after their experience with the Holocaust survivor. “This experience will forever change and impact my life ... [and] given me a different perspective of life,” said one. Winn concludes, “The new generation of distance education technologies not only increases efficiency, but it also increases quality. In the current economic times, those states that put innovation at the top of their budget priorities will not only survive, but thrive and flourish.”

The district’s principal greatly appreciates the new learning opportunities

afforded to both his students and the community at large:

- Three dual-credit courses—English 101, Psychology 101 and Communications 101—with the College of Southern Idaho and Twin Falls High School
- Virtual learning opportunities such as a freshman English class’s conversation with the author of Mississippi Trial, 1955, Chris Crowe, and Winn’s junior English class’s virtual tour of the Holocaust Museum in New York and conversation with an actual survivor

*“In the current economic times, those states that put innovation at the top of their budget priorities will not only survive, but thrive and flourish.”*

*—Jim Winn, Sugar-Salem High School, English Teacher*

- Collaborative learning experiences such as the same junior English class’s study of Elie Wiesel’s classic novel Night with a New York high school class

- Sugar-Salem High School’s offering of a master’s of human resources program with Utah State University via VTC



Photo courtesy of Tandberg

- Virtual meetings between local residents and their legislators

Says Jenks, “[The IEN] has hoped our students to a whole new world of possibilities and opportunities ... In the near future, I hope students will be graduating from Sugar-Salem High School with an associate degree from a state institution.”

As a few of the IEN supporters above alluded to, our state, like most of the country, is struggling with financial issues. But with mounting evidence from our own schools and local communities that the network is vastly enhancing learning opportunities while actually saving them substantial amounts of money, it seems increasingly apparent that the IEN is a project that Idaho can’t live without.

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